Aims
We aimed to identify the most common types of questions authors ask editorial offices and determine whether these vary based on the journal.

Process
We collected data on questions submitted by authors to three peer-reviewed journals between February 1 and April 30, 2018. The three peer-reviewed journals included were Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (GIE), The Journal of Pediatrics, and JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute. A list of 14 question categories was prepared for data collection. Majority consensus was used as needed to resolve doubt about whether a follow-up question was considered a new inquiry.

Category Description
1 Manuscript preparation and formatting (article types accepted and article type requirements, word count, page count, abstract format, limits to the number of figures/tables, how to find author instructions, how to submit, Articles sent back for formatting or missing components)
2 Ethics (IRB approval, trial registration, disclosures/COIs, funding sources, response to ethical concerns—overlap in text)
3 Cost (fee to submit or publish, color fee)
4a Submission status pre-acceptance
4b Submission status post-acceptance (time to publication, when will proofs be received, appearance on PubMed)
5 Technical difficulties with submission system
6 Authorship (number of authors, changes to author list, changes to corresponding author)
7 Article proposal / submission inquiry (authors emailing office abstracts, asking “is this worth submitting?”)
8 Rejection rebuttal
9 Extensions on revision
10 Questions about reviewer comments
11a Correction after acceptance, before proof
11b Correction after publication
12 Post-acceptance correspondence (social media, author interviews/podcasts, press releases, etc)
13 Question about invited articles (Editorials, replies to letters to the editor)
14 Other

Discussion
The most common questions received across the three journals were related to manuscript preparation and formatting. Because every journal has unique formatting and submission requirements, manuscript preparation can be frustrating for authors especially if they submit to more than one journal. Each journal also selected one category for which they received more questions than the other two journals to investigate. Each journal speculated about why it received more questions for that category and feedback was shared among the journals.

Conclusion
We discussed possible solutions to address the volume of questions received related to manuscript preparation and formatting. As a possible solution, a standard list of essential requirements could be developed that all journals could use. Additionally, because most journal author instructions are long and detailed, we thought a visually appealing quick start guide or cheat sheet with simplified instructions could be helpful.

Do you have a suggestion that can help us address these FAQs? Share your thoughts through the ISMTE Conference app!